



CHIARA BONUGLIA

## ATTICUS ON THE STATUS OF PLATONIC IDEAS

**ABSTRACT:** Atticus' fragments clearly testify that his commitment to a literal interpretation of the *Timaeus* along the lines of the craftsman model. Atticus assumed the three-principled theory according to which God, ideas-paradigms, and matter are the 'causes' of the sensible world. Nevertheless, the role of the *παράδειγμα* within metaphysical reality is difficult to define, especially because when Atticus refers to ideas, he seems to support, on one hand, the idea that Forms coincide to god's thoughts but, on the other hand, he seems to refuse this identification. This issue is complicated by the fact that Atticus refers to ideas as *παράττια* (collateral causes: fr. 9). This expression doesn't allude to a downgrading of ideas – as some scholars have argued – but it regards only the cosmological causation.

**SOMMARIO:** I frammenti di Attico testimoniano chiaramente che Attico fu fedele a un'interpretazione letterale del *Timeo* sulla scorta del modello artigianale da lui adottato. Attico assunse la teoria dei tre principi secondo la quale il dio, le idee-paradigmi e la materia sono le 'cause' del mondo sensibile. Ciò nonostante, il ruolo del *παράδειγμα* all'interno della realtà metafisica è difficile da definire, specie perché quando Attico si riferisce alle idee, da una parte sembra supportare l'idea che le forme coincidono con i pensieri di dio; dall'altra parte, Attico sembra invece rifiutare questa identificazione. Quest'argomento è complicato dal fatto che Attico definisce le idee come *παράττια* (cause collaterali: fr. 9). Questa espressione non allude a un declassamento delle idee – come alcuni studiosi hanno ritenuto – ma concerne soltanto la causalità cosmologica.

**KEYWORDS:** Atticus; Middle Platonism; Ideas as Thoughts of God; Literalism; *παράττια*

Atticus' stance on the nature of ideas is not entirely clear: we cannot reconstruct it with certainty from the texts that have come down to us. The first problem is an inconsistency between Atticus' fragments and some other indirect testimonia on his doctrine. On the one hand, there would

seem to be enough material to conclude that Atticus viewed ideas as coinciding with god's thoughts, as some middle Platonists did.<sup>1</sup> So much can apparently be gathered from his fragments. On the other hand, however, even considering this interpretation sufficiently founded, it would nonetheless conflict with Atticus' typically hyper-literal reading of Plato's texts that assumes that ideas are totally independent, even from the demiurge.

In what follows, I will deal in some more detail with Atticus' view on the role of eidetic paradigm, considering all the testimonia where he refers to Plato's ideas. I will quote in translation the evidences provided by Eusebius of Caesarea in his *Praeparatio Evangelica*,<sup>2</sup> by Proclus in his *Timaeus* commentary, and by Syrianus in his *Metaphysics* commentary (= fr. 9, 34, 12, 28, 40 des Places). I will discuss these texts attempting to show that Atticus' literal interpretation of Plato's *Timaeus* implies the following consequences: a) Atticus is not committed to the doctrine of ideas as thoughts of god (or at least he is only committed to it in the special way I will clarify later in this paper); b) he views the paradigm as separated from the demiurge; c) he regards ideas as performing their causal action only in a secondary (or mediate) and non-essential way.

The first reference to Atticus' thesis that the demiurge is identical with the model can be found in fr. 9. This is the last of the fragments preserved in Eusebius' *Praeparatio Evangelica*. In this text, Atticus accuses Aristotle of rejecting, endangering, and even trampling over Plato's theory of ideas,<sup>3</sup> whose necessity he is keen to emphasize. "The order of the intelligibles" (ἡ περὶ τῶν νοητῶν διάταξις), as he calls Plato's theory of ideas,

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Phil. Alex. *De opif. mund.* 19; Aët. *Plac.* I 3,21 e 10,3; Sen. *Ep.* 65,7. On the ideas as thoughts of the God, see M. Baltes, *Die Weltentstehung des platonischen Timaios nach den Antiken Interpretationen*, vol. 1, Leiden, Brill, 1976; "Verso la costituzione del sistema: il medioplatonismo", *Paradigmi*, 21, 2003, p. 345-354; Id., "L'esegesi medioplatonica del *Timeo*: metodi, finalità, risultati", in F. Celia, A. Ulacco (eds.), *Il Timeo: esegesi greche, arabe, latine*, Pisa, Edizioni Plus – Pisa University Press, 2012, p. 81-131; M. Bonazzi, "Un lettore antico della *Repubblica*: Numenio di Apamea", *Méthexis*, 17, 2004, p. 71-84; P. d'Hoine, A. Michalewski, "Ontologia ed epistemologia: le Idee e la partecipazione," in R. Chiaradonna, *Filosofia tardoantica*, Roma, Carocci, 2012, p. 173-191. G. Boys-Stones, *Platonist Philosophy 80 BC to AD 250*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2018, p. 125-146.

<sup>2</sup> Eusebius of Caesarea in books 11 and 15 of his *Praeparatio Evangelica* quotes Atticus' fragments of his Πρὸς τοὺς διὰ τῶν Ἀριστοτέλους τὰ Πλάτωνος ὑπισχνομένους.

<sup>3</sup> É. des Places, *Atticus: fragments*, Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 1977, fr. 9 (= Eus. *Pr. Ev.* XV, 13, 1-6, p. 67-69).

represents “the capital part, the strength of Plato’s school” (τὸ δὲ κεφάλαιον καὶ τὸ κύρος τῆς Πλάτωνος αἰρέσεως). Here is what he claims:<sup>4</sup>

The summit and the ultimate end of Plato’s philosophy is what concern this intelligible and eternal essence of Ideas (τὸ περὶ τὴν νοητὴν ταύτην καὶ αἰδίων οὐσίαν τὴν τῶν ιδεῶν), where the soul must perform its ultimate effort and struggle. For those who participate in it and reach it are entirely happy, while those who fall behind cannot contemplate it and give up without taking part in happiness. Plato therefore makes every effort to show the strength of these natures. He claims that it is impossible to determine the cause of anything without participating in them, nor is knowledge of any truth possible without ascending towards them (i.e. the Ideas). Moreover, no one will be able to participate in reason if they will not agree on their existence.<sup>5</sup>

In the same fragment Atticus goes on to say this:

[Plato] understood that god is their father, craftsman, master and protector (πατέρα καὶ δημιουργὸν καὶ δεσπότην καὶ κηδεμόνα). Looking at a craftsman’s works, Plato came to understand that he first conceives (νοῆσαι) what he intends to realize and then goes on to make things similar to the model he has conceived. In the same way, he held that the thoughts of god (τὰ τοῦ θεοῦ νοήματα) precede things: models of all becoming things, incorporeal and intelligible, ‘always remaining identical with themselves’, existing entirely and primarily in themselves, collateral causes (παραίτια)<sup>6</sup> of other things whose being is such that each of them exists because of its similarity to them [i.e. the Ideas]. In addition, Plato understood that all this is not easy to observe, nor it can be clearly manifested by means of discourse. Therefore, as if speaking of these subjects to those who were about to follow him, and thinking of them and preparing them, addressing these issues and founding his whole philosophy on them, he claims that it is on them [i.e. the Ideas] and on the knowledge of them that depend wisdom and science, which lead us to the human end and the happy life.<sup>7</sup>

If we look at what Atticus says in fr. 9, particularly in the second part of it, we can conclude that his view of the παράδειγμα is pretty traditional. This means that this view seems to be perfectly in keeping with Plato’s standard theory of ideas, i.e. that ideas are the separated self-identical and

---

<sup>4</sup> All translations from Greek into English are my own.

<sup>5</sup> Eus. *Pr. Ev.* XV, 13, 2-3 (= Att. fr. 9 des Places).

<sup>6</sup> Des Places translates the Greek noun παραίτια as ‘partial causes’: cf. des Places, *Atticus: fragments*, p. 69. The literal meaning of the word is ‘be complicit’, ‘have one’s share of responsibility’. This is why I chose to render it as ‘collateral cause’. For an overview of the occurrences of παραίτια before Atticus, see A. Michalewski, *La puissance de l’intelligible. La théorie plotinienne des Formes au miroir de l’héritage médioplatonicien*, Leuven, Leuven University Press, 2014, p. 81-84.

<sup>7</sup> Eus. *Pr. Ev.* XV, 13, 5 (= Att. fr. 9 des Places).

unchanging models as well as the paradigmatic causes of every created thing. This crops up a problem, however, as to the making of the cosmos. We have to ask how ideas can function as a model for the plurality of generated things and what their position is with respect to the demiurge. About this problem we should firstly clarify what Atticus means by ‘creation’. The first reference must be to the *Timaeus*, which he interprets literally. ‘Literalism’ towards Plato’s texts was not by chance a typical feature of Atticus’ philosophy, and it led him to understand the making of the cosmos by the demiurge as a fact taking place in time. Atticus and, on this count, Plutarch, became famous for holding that the creation of the cosmos occurred *κατὰ χρόνον* or *ἐν χρόνῳ*, i.e. that the world was made by the demiurge at a certain point in time before which there was nothing but undifferentiated matter (*ὕλη*) moving in a chaotic and disorderly way (*ἄτακτος*).<sup>8</sup> Based on the claim in *Phaedrus* 245c5 that the soul is by definition a self-moving entity, and on Plato’s references in the *Laws* (X, 892a-c, 896d-e, 898c) to the existence of an evil soul, Atticus regarded pre-cosmic matter as moved by a chaotic and irrational soul, *ἄλογος ψυχή*. Only the action of the divine soul (*θεία ψυχή*)<sup>9</sup> could finally enable the world soul to become a rational soul (*λογική ψυχή*), ungenerated with respect to its substrate (*ἀγέννητος κατὰ τὸ ὑποκείμενον*) and generated with respect to its form (*γενητὴ κατὰ εἶδος*)<sup>10</sup>. All of this plays a crucial role when it comes to Atticus’ view on the status of ideas.

<sup>8</sup> On Plutarch see P. Th  venaz, *L’  me du monde, le devenir et la mati  re chez Plutarque*, Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 1938; L. Brisson, *Le m  me et l’autre dans la structure ontologique du Tim  e de Platon*, Paris, Klincksieck, 1974, p. 58-64; F. Ferrari, “La teoria delle idee in Plutarco”, *Elenchos*, 27, 1996, p. 121-142. On Atticus, see Baltes, *Die Weltentstehung des platonischen Timaios*, p. 38-45; F. Ferrari, L. Baldi (eds.), *La generazione dell’anima nel Timeo*, Napoli, D’Auria, 2002-2006; G.-E. Karamanolis, *Plato and Aristotle in Agreement? Platonists on Aristotle from Antiochus to Porphyry*, Oxford, Clarendon, 2006, p. 85-126, F. Ferrari, “Materie, Seele und Bewegung vor der Weltentstehung: Plutarch und Attikos als Interpreten des Platonischen Timaios”, in J. Halfwassen, T. Dangel, C. O’Brien (eds.), *Seele und Materie im Neuplatonismus – Soul and Matter in Neoplatonism*, Heidelberg, Universit  tsverlag, 2016, p. 26-54; F.-M. Petrucci, “  ντ  χεσθαι τ  ν ρ  ματων: The Neoplatonic Criticism of Atticus’ Exegesis of Plato’s Cosmology”, in Halfwassen, Dangel, O’Brien (eds.), *Seele und Materie*, p. 75-103.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Att. fr. 35. 3 (des Places).

<sup>10</sup> On the temporal interpretation and the related issue of the nature of the soul, cf. Att. fr. 4 and 8; Iambl. fr. 10 and 11; Procl. fr. 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 29, 30, 31, 35 (des Places); Iohan. Philop. fr. 38a, 38b, 39 (des Places). More specifically, for the literal-temporal reading see Baltes’ extensive treatment of Atticus’ interpretation of the meaning of *  γονεν*: Baltes, *Die Weltentstehung*, particularly p. 45-63. Useful in understanding the use of this verb is Calvenus Taurus’ discussion of *  γεντ  ν* as *πολλ  χως*

As I said earlier, from fragment 9 we can infer that what the demiurge does when he sets out to frame the cosmos is nothing but an adjustment, i.e. he makes the chaotic pre-cosmic reality resemble the model he has conceived. According to this fragment, then, the demiurge has primarily in himself an eidetic conception. By contrast, no reference is made to him directing his gaze to the world of ideas, as it is claimed in *Timaeus* 28a. This being so, we could be tempted to subscribe to the view that the demiurge has the *παράδειγμα* in himself.<sup>11</sup> Yet, the text does not make explicit that he contains the ideas; it just says that he possesses a conception that precedes creation. A brief discussion of the word *παραίτια* will be in order here. Its translation as ‘collateral cause’ is in my view extremely significant. The word refers to the thoughts of god, regarded as the paradigms of becoming things, as incorporeal, intelligible and always identical with themselves (fr. 9, 5, 40-43). For these are undoubtedly the traditional characteristics of ideas, it would seem right to support the thesis that ideas are the thoughts of god. Yet, there is a problem. If Atticus were referring to ideas as identical with the thoughts of god, why should he ever have called them ‘collateral causes’ (*παραίτια*) and not, properly speaking, just ‘causes’ (*αἴτια*)? At least two answers can be given to this question. Either, (A) Atticus was thinking of the fact that ideas cannot be the direct cause of becoming, since they need the help of the demiurge who, in virtue of his intellect, can conceive them and ‘translate’ them into the world of becoming (and thus giving them the role of ‘collateral causes’). Or, (B) the word *παραίτια* has to be taken as referred to the thoughts of god, which are the collateral – or partial – causes of becoming alongside the actual causes, i.e. ideas. For what regards the existence of ideas, we should not forget that Atticus himself repeatedly claims that they are necessary.<sup>12</sup> We can conclude that the

---

λεγόμενον: cf. Iohan. Philop. *Aet. mund.* 121, 18-21; 145,1-147,25 (Rabe). See also des Places, *Atticus: fragments*, p. 15-17; J. Dillon, *The Middle Platonists 80 B.C. to A.D. 220*, Ithaca-New York, Cornell University Press, 1977, p. 237-247; Karamanolis, *Plato and Aristotle in Agreement?*, p. 179-185. Further discussions of Atticus’ and Plutarch’s interpretations of the *Timaeus* are to be found in des Places, *Atticus: fragments*, p. 10-15. On Atticus’ psychology, see M. Zambon, *Porphyre et le moyen-platonisme*, Paris, Vrin, 2002, p. 161-169. See also F.-M. Petrucci, “Argumentative Strategies for Interpreting Plato’s Cosmogony: Taurus and the Issue of Literalism in Antiquity”, *Phronesis*, 61, 2016, p. 43-59.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. C. Moreschini, “Attico: una figura singolare nel medioplatonismo”, *ANRW*, 36 (1), 1987, p. 477-491: 488-489.

<sup>12</sup> In addition to holding that the doctrine of ideas is “the summit and the ultimate end of Plato’s philosophy”, Atticus defined Ideas as *τὰς πρώτας φύσεις* (‘first realities’) and

passage preserved by Eusebius fails to unambiguously clarify Atticus' view on the status of ideas.

Proclus' testimony (fr. 34)<sup>13</sup> explicitly addresses the above-mentioned problem and asks what, according to Atticus, is the relationship between the 'Living being in itself' (τὸ αὐτοζῶν) and the demiurge. The text reads as follows:

As regards these things, Atticus asked whether the demiurge is embraced [i.e. comprised] by the intelligible living being (ὁ δημιουργὸς ὑπὸ τοῦ νοητοῦ ζώου περιέχεται). For it seems that, were he embraced by it, he could not be perfect. Partial living beings – he claims – are imperfect, and this is why those who resemble them are not beautiful. On the other hand, were the demiurge not embraced, the living being in itself would no longer be the most comprehensive of all the intelligibles (οὐ πάντων τῶν νοητῶν εἶναι τὸ αὐτοζῶν περιληπτικώτερον). Confronted with this issue, Atticus easily ended up viewing the demiurge as superior to the living being in itself (ὑπὲρ τὸ αὐτοζῶν).<sup>14</sup>

According to Proclus' testimony, Atticus regards the demiurge superior to the living being in itself because it is more 'comprehensive'.<sup>15</sup> This would seem to confirm that in Atticus' opinion the paradigm is in some way inferior to the demiurge. Even if this were the case, it would not be enough to demonstrate that the ideas coincide with the thoughts of god. If we were to regard the living being in itself as 'embraced'<sup>16</sup> by the demiurge, then, in the light of what we claimed above about the Ideas (i.e. that their existence is necessary and that they play a key role in determining any truth: fr. 9), we should consider the two as being on a par with each other, and refrain from subordinating one of them to the other. But, again, the assumption that the demiurge entirely coincides with the paradigm is far from unproblematic. A possible, formally conciliatory interpretation would be to maintain that Ideas, though not perfectly identical with the demiurge, coincide with intellect, which our evidence describes Atticus as distinguishing from the demiurgic soul. As to intellect, Proclus reports Porphyry's view that Atticus equated it with the Good, i.e. with the

---

ἀρχικωτάτας ('principles in a supreme sense'): cf. Att. fr. 9, 32 (des Places). This claim was a part of his criticism of Aristotle.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Procl. *In Tim.* I, 431, 14-20, in A.-J. Festugière (éd.), *Proclus, Commentaire sur le Timée*, Paris, Vrin, 1967, p. 156-157.

<sup>14</sup> Procl. *In Tim.* I, 431, 14-20 Diehl (= Att. fr. 34 des Places).

<sup>15</sup> On this see Dillon, *The Middle Platonists*, p. 254.

<sup>16</sup> The term 'embrace' translates the Greek verb περιέχω. It refers to the inclusion of something in something else and it can indicate a relationship of superiority or inferiority depending on who happens to embrace and be embraced.

supreme Idea of the Good mentioned in Plato's *Republic* (VI, 509b9). It is not by chance that, within Proclus' commentary, this testimony can be found in the section about the identity of the demiurge.<sup>17</sup> The text reads as follows:

Atticus [...] identifies the demiurge with the good, although Plato calls the demiurge 'good' (ἀγαθός), not 'the Good' (τὰγαθὸν δὲ οὐ), whereas the Intellect is called the good which is the cause of every essence beyond being (αἴτιον ἀπάσης οὐσίας καὶ ἐπέκεινα τοῦ ὄντος), as we learned in the *Republic*. For what could we say about the paradigm? Either it precedes the demiurge, hence it will be older than the good; or it is in the demiurge, hence the first will be many things (ἔσται πολλὰ τὸ πρῶτον);<sup>18</sup> or it comes after the demiurge, and the Good – as we are not in the habit of saying – will turn towards what comes after itself and will think it (εἰς τὰ μετ' αὐτὸ ἐπιστραφήσεται καὶ κείνῳ νοήσει).<sup>19</sup>

Given its content and the language used by Proclus, this testimony would deserve a separate discussion. Since I cannot deepen this argument here, I will only take up Proclus' reference to Atticus. If, as Proclus claims, the Good and the demiurge – or rather, the demiurgic Intellect – were one and the same thing, this would mean that the ideas are subordinate to god. In other words, equating the idea of the Good with the demiurgic intellect would turn god into a model for anything good in the sensible world and would ascribe to the demiurge the exemplarism that usually (i.e. in Plato) was a characteristic of the ideas.<sup>20</sup> In order to bypass these consequences, it is necessary to clarify the issue of the identity of God with the Good.

The demiurge coincides with the idea of the Good since it bestows on every created thing the goodness that he possesses by essence. It is only in this regard that the two can be equated,<sup>21</sup> since the evidence I have quoted so far does not allow us to think that the very existence of the ideas depends on divine thought. What does depend on it, it is just the ability to form an intelligible conception of the ideas with a view to creating the cosmos, as

---

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Festugière, *Commentaire sur le Timée*, p. 156-159.

<sup>18</sup> I.e. the Good and the Model (Festugière). Cf. Festugière, *Commentaire sur le Timée*, p. 159.

<sup>19</sup> Procl. *In Tim.* I, 305, 6-16 Diehl (= Att. fr. 12 des Places).

<sup>20</sup> Nor can it be argued that there are two Models, i.e. the Good (Intellect) and the Ideas. This could formally represent a solution to the problem, but from Atticus' Platonic perspective it is quite unacceptable.

<sup>21</sup> As A. Michalewski aptly remarks, "le souci exégétique d'Atticus est de maintenir à la fois l'unité du Bien et la multiplicité des intelligibles. Si le Bien et l'intellect ne font qu'un, la multiplicité intelligible ne peut être qu'extérieure au dieu"; cf. Michalewski, *La puissance de l'intelligible*, p. 78.

we saw in fr. 9 (35 ff.). A passage by Proclus, who quotes Porphyry's criticism of Atticus' conception of the ideas, supports the view that ideas exist independently of the demiurge:

The third point is that the creator, whom they assume as a principle, does not belong to Plato. For, according to Plato, ideas are not in themselves separate from the intellect of the demiurge, but the intellect, once it has turned towards itself (εἰς ἑαυτὸν ἐπεστραμμένος), sees (i.e. in itself) all the forms. This is why the Athenian stranger<sup>22</sup> compared the activity of the intellect with the revolution of 'a round sphere'. [Atticus] regards ideas as existing in themselves and outside intellect (ἐξω τοῦ νοῦ), inert and resembling the figures of statuette-makers. Nor (i.e. according to Plato) is the demiurge the first god, for the latter is superior to all intelligible essence. Nor is the soul something irrational that moves what is carried about 'in an irregular and disorderly way'. For the whole soul is a product of god. Nor finally does the universe become orderly from disorder.<sup>23</sup>

According to Proclus, the reason why Porphyry criticizes Atticus is that he separated Forms from the demiurgic Intellect and made them lifeless. Once again, the argument quoted by Proclus can only be made sense of on the assumptions of Neoplatonic philosophy. However, if we focus the reference to Atticus, we can find a confirmation of his commitment to a literal interpretation of the theory of Ideas, along the lines of the traditional Platonism he undoubtedly championed.<sup>24</sup>

The last Atticus' reference to Ideas can be found in the *Metaphysics* commentary of the neoplatonist Syrianus.<sup>25</sup> The problem of the dependence of Ideas on god seems here to be in some respects even more complex. Syrianus claims that Atticus viewed Ideas as λόγοι residing in the divine soul. Here is the passage:

<sup>22</sup> The reference here is to *Laws* X, 898 b2: cf. des Places, *Atticus: fragments*, p. 77.

<sup>23</sup> Procl. *In Tim.* I, 393, 31-394, 12 Diehl (= Att. fr. 28 des Places).

<sup>24</sup> For evidences on Atticus' 'traditional' view of ideas as exemplary causes, see Procl. *In Tim.* I, 366, 9-13 Diehl (Att. fr. 13 des Places.): "As the carpenter – Atticus claims – does in all his carpentry works, but according to a different model [he makes] a chair or a bed, so god, since he is good, renders all things like himself by making them beautiful, but according to the forms that are attributed to them he realizes for each of them its essence as a result of (i.e. based on) the paradigmatic causes" ("Ὡς περ γὰρ, φησὶν Ἀττικὸς, ὁ τέκτων πάντα μὲν τεκτονικὰ ποιεῖ, ἄλλα δὲ κατ' ἄλλον λόγον, τὸ μὲν βῆθρον, τὸ δὲ κλίνην, οὕτω καὶ ὁ θεός, ἢ μὲν ἀγαθός, ἐξομοιοῖ πάντα ἑαυτῷ, ἀγαθὰ ἀποτελῶν, κατὰ δὲ τὰ εἶδη τὰ μερίζοντα τὰς ἐκάστων οὐσίας ποιεῖ πρὸς τὰς παραδειγματικὰς αἰτίας). It should be noted that the carpenter analogy emphasizes that all created things are good because god is good. In this sense, then, all works are equal. Yet they are not equal to the point of being indistinguishable, for a different model is applied to each of them.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Syr. *In Arist. Metaph.*, CAG, VI, p. 105, 36-38 (Kroll); des Places, *Atticus: fragments*, p. 81.



Nor Plutarch nor Atticus nor Democritus – the Platonists – shall we imitate in this: i.e. when they equate ideas with such universal reasons as exist eternally in the essence of the soul (τοὺς καθόλου λόγους τοὺς ἐν οὐσίᾳ τῇ ψυχικῇ διαιωνίως ὑπάρχοντας ἡγοῦνται εἶναι τὰς ἰδέας).<sup>26</sup>

Syrianus' claim apparently raises a further problem regarding the location of Ideas, which are here regarded as existing in the divine psychic substance. We have to keep in mind that in Atticus' opinion, Plato, unlike Aristotle, held that god cannot be a pure intellect (νοῦς), since there can be no intellect without a soul.<sup>27</sup> The demiurge, therefore, possesses not only an Intellect, but also a soul. The suggestion that the soul is the 'place' of ideas represents a good exegetical solution to the problem of Atticus' view on their ontological location, while, at the same time, it helps settling the issue of the "noetic conception of the demiurge". The soul can think the ideas, which inevitably brings multiplicity into play.<sup>28</sup> Intellect, by contrast, due to its absolute simplicity, can only guarantee that creation is good, thanks to its identification with the idea of the Good (fr. 12). This interpretation would allow us to account for fr. 9, where ideas are described as "thoughts of god".<sup>29</sup> It should be emphasized, however, that even if ideas are regarded

<sup>26</sup> Syr. *In. Arist. Metaph.*, CAG, VI, 1 p. 36-38 Kroll (= Att. fr. 40 des Places).

<sup>27</sup> See Att. fr. 8, 25-26: ὁ μὲν γὰρ [Πλάτων] φησι νοῦν ἄνευ ψυχῆς ἀδύνατον εἶναι συνίστασθαι; Plat. *Tim.* 30b3-5; *Soph.* 249a4-8. Atticus would seem to be criticizing Aristotle for separating the intellect from the soul. As Zambon points out, if the paradigm is thought to be outside the demiurge and identical with the immanent λόγοι that are *ab aeterno* in the soul, then, it can function as a mediator between God and the chaotic matter. This is because the soul is the principle of movement (αὐτοκίνητον), hence it can transform matter into an orderly cosmos. Just like Plato's παντέλως ὄν, Atticus' demiurge is not a νοῦς ἀπλῶς, but a νοῦς ἐν ψυχῇ; producing the world, he comes to grips with a κίνησις that is proper to the soul. See Zambon, *Porphyre et le moyen-platonisme*, p. 154-161. Baltes suggests that Atticus equates the demiurge's divine soul, i.e. the indivisible essence of the *Timaieus*, with the οὐσία τῶν ιδεῶν: cf. M. Baltes, "Zur Philosophie des Platonikers Artikos", in H.-D. Blume, F. Mann (eds.), *Platonismus und Christentum. Festschrift für Heinrich Dörrie* (Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum, Ergänzungsband, 10) Münster, Aschendorff, 1983, p. 38-57, reprinted in A. Hüffmeier, M.-L. Lakmann, M. Vorwerk (eds.), *ΔΙΑΝΟΗΜΑΤΑ. Kleine Schriften zu Platon und zum Platonismus*, Stuttgart-Leipzig, Teubner, 1999, p. 81-111.

<sup>28</sup> Due to their paradigmatic character, Forms/Ideas introduce multiplicity and require the existence of 'something' that can think them. Only from this point of view, then, they can be regarded as 'thoughts of god'. See the clear discussion in Karamanolis, *Plato and Aristotle in Agreement?*, p. 170 and Ferrari, *La teoria delle idee in Plutarco*, p. 129-130. See also Boys-Stones, *Platonist Philosophy*, p. 125-133.

<sup>29</sup> If – given what Atticus claims in fr. 28 – ideas are to have a separate ontological location from the demiurgic intellect, while at the same time being present in it, then a good solution is to place them in the soul.

as ‘thoughts’, this does not mean that the paradigm entirely coincides with the demiurge. The fact that they reside eternally in the soul (fr. 40) does not necessarily imply that their existence depends on the demiurge. Rather, god thinks them in virtue of his soul, and divine thought enables them to function as παραδείγματα for all becoming things<sup>30</sup> (fr. 9). This interpretation implies the assumption of a difference between an ontological explanation and a cosmological one. It behoves us to make this distinction because is only in doing it that it’s possible to understand Atticus’ point of view. However, this difference is not clearly stated in Plato’s *Timaeus* but it underpins a typical trait of the ‘artificialist’ model embraced by a lot of ‘middleplatonists’.

### Conclusions

The claim that ideas are the ‘thoughts of god’ does not imply – formally speaking – that the demiurge produces the model. Since we may plausibly argue that god can think a model he did not produce.<sup>31</sup> Once they have been contemplated by the Intellect of the divine craftsman, the Forms are reflected in his soul and thus become ‘thoughts of god’, i.e. models for what becomes (τὰ τῶν γενομένων παραδείγματα). This interpretation rules out the possibility that Atticus subscribed to the thesis according to which Ideas are simply ‘thoughts of god’. Ideas retain all the necessary characteristics of the genuine Platonism, starting with their autarchic separateness and independence, not only with respect to the cosmos, but also to the demiurge. This because the demiurge, if he has to fashion the cosmos, must be able to grasp the ideas – which is exactly what fr. 9 from Eusebius<sup>32</sup> claims, and this is in keeping with the *Timaeus*.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>30</sup> This interpretation is endorsed with different degrees of conviction by Dillon and Karamanolis. See Dillon, *The Middle Platonists*, p. 256; Karamanolis, *Plato and Aristotle in Agreement?*, p. 168-170. See also J. Opsomer, “Demiurges in Early Imperial Platonism”, in R. Hirsch-Luipold (ed.), *Gott und die Götter bei Plutarch*, Berlin, De Gruyter, 2005, p. 51-99; Ferrari, *La teoria delle idee in Plutarco*, p. 131-132.

<sup>31</sup> Michalewski, *La puissance de l’intelligible*, p. 78.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Eus. *Pr. Ev.* XV, 13, 2-3 (fr. 9).

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Plat. *Tim.* 29a2-b2: “If this world is really beautiful, and the demiurge is really good, then it is evident that he directed his gaze to what is eternal; if not – which we are not even allowed to say – [he looked to] what is generated. Yet it is clear to all that he looked to what is eternal, since this world is the most beautiful of generated things and its maker the best of causes. Having been thus generated, it was modelled on what is grasped by reason and thought and remains identical with itself”.

Some people regarded the word *παράϊτια* (fr. 9.43) as implying an ontological downgrading of ideas, and as a hint at the view that they are produced by the demiurge and thus subordinate to him;<sup>34</sup> others have suggested a Stoic influence on Atticus.<sup>35</sup> Contrary to such speculations, I have shown that the three-principled doctrine is, in my opinion, perfectly acceptable, for it accords with Atticus' commitment to the craftsman model and his literal interpretation of the *Timaeus*. Probably, Atticus was not much interested in establishing whether Ideas are 'inside' or 'outside' the demiurge. What certainly mattered to him was their *function*. In his view, Ideas firstly have a value in themselves whether or not they play a paradigmatic role with respect to the sensible world. From a secondary and 'collateral' standpoint, they function as causes of the sensible world, since they are cosmologically subordinated to the first causal power: the demiurge<sup>36</sup> (fr. 9.35).

REFERENCES:

- Baltes, Matthias, *Die Weltentstehung des platonischen Timaios nach den Antiken Interpretieren*, vol. 1, Leiden, Brill, 1976.
- Baltes, Matthias, "Zur Philosophie des Platonikers Attikos", in H.-D. Blume, F. Mann (eds.), *Platonismus und Christentum. Festschrift für Heinrich Dörrie* (Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum, Ergänzungsband, 10) Münster, Aschendorff, 1983, p. 38-57.
- Baltes, Matthias, *ΔΙΑΝΟΗΜΑΤΑ. Kleine Schriften zu Platon und zum Platonismus*, ed. by Annette Hüffmeier, Marie-Luise Lakmann, Matthias Vorwerks, Stuttgart-Leipzig, Teubner, 1999, p. 81-111.
- Baltes, Matthias-Dörrie, Heinrich, *Der Platonismus in der Antike*, Band III. *Der Platonismus im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert nach Christus*, Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt, Frommann-Holzboog, 1993.
- Barnes, Jonathan, "Roman Aristotle", in Jonathan Barnes, Miriam Griffin (eds.) *Philosophia Togata II. Plato and Aristotle at Rome*, Oxford, Clarendon, 1997.

---

<sup>34</sup> See Moreschini, *Attico*, p. 489. H. Dörrie went so far as to speak of a 'derealization' of Ideas. He considered the words *paraitia* and *sunaitia* as synonymous and emphasized their instrumental value: see Michalewski, *La puissance de l'intelligible*, p. 83.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Opsomer, *Demiurges*, p. 51-99; A. Michalewski, *Faut-il préférer Epicure à Aristote? Quelques réflexions sur la providence*, in F. Baghdassarian, G. Guyomarc'h (éds.), *Réceptions de la théologie aristotélicienne d'Aristote à Michel d'Ephèse*, Leuven, Leuven-la-Neuve, Peeters, 2017, p. 108-123; F.-M. Petrucci, *Taurus of Beirut. The Other Side of Middle Platonism*, London-New York, Routledge, 2018, ch. 3.

<sup>36</sup> My interpretation is along the lines of that proposed by Baltes; see Baltes, *ΔΙΑΝΟΗΜΑΤΑ*, p. 94-95. Cf. also Michalewski, *La puissance de l'intelligible*, p. 81-84.

- Boys-Stones, George, *Platonist Philosophy 80 BC to AD 250*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2018.
- Bonazzi, Mauro-Chiaradonna, Riccardo, “Prima di Plotino: le correnti filosofiche in età imperiale”, in Riccardo Chiaradonna (ed.) *Filosofia tardoantica*, Roma, Carocci, 2012.
- Brancacci, Aldo (ed.), *La filosofia in età imperiale*, Napoli, Bibliopolis, 2000.
- Brisson, Luc, *Le même et l'autre dans la structure ontologique du Timée de Platon*, Paris, Klincksieck, 1974.
- Chiaradonna, Riccardo, “Interpretazione filosofica e ricezione del *corpus*. Il caso di Aristotele (100 a.C. – 250 d.C)”, in Lucio Del Corso, Paolo Pecere (eds.), *Il libro filosofico. Dall'antichità al XXI secolo. Philosophy and the Books. From Antiquity to the XXI<sup>st</sup> Century*, *Quaestio*, 11, 2011, p. 83-114.
- Chiaradonna, Riccardo, “Plotinus’ Account of Demiurgic Causation and its Philosophical Background”, in Anna Marmodoro, Brian D. Prince (eds.), *Causation and Creation in Late Antiquity*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2015, p. 31-50.
- Chiaradonna, Riccardo, “Medioplatonismo e Aristotelismo”, *Rivista di storia della filosofia*, 2, 2015, p. 425-446.
- des Places, Édouard, *Atticus: fragments*, Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 1977.
- D’Hoine, Pieter-Michalewski, Alexandra, “Ontologia ed epistemologia: le Idee e la partecipazione”, in Riccardo Chiaradonna (ed.), *Filosofia tardoantica*, Roma, Carocci, 2012, p. 173-191.
- Dillon, John, *The Middle Platonists 80 B.C. to A.D. 220*, Ithaca-New York, Cornell University Press, 1977 (1996<sup>2</sup>).
- Donini, Pierluigi, *Le scuole, l'anima, l'impero: la filosofia antica da Antioco a Plotino*, Torino, Rosenberg & Sellier, 1982.
- Donini, Pierluigi, “Testo e commenti, manuali e insegnamento: la forma sistematica e i metodi della filosofia postellenistica”, *ANRW*, II, 36 (7) 1994, p. 5027-5100.
- Falcon, Andrea, “Aristotelianism in the First Century BC”, in Andrea Falcon (ed.), *Brill’s Companion to the Reception of Aristotle in Antiquity*, Leiden-Boston, Brill, 2016.
- Falcon, Andrea, “Medioplatonismo e filosofi medioplatonici. Una raccolta di studi”, *Elenchos*, 11, 1990, p. 79-93.
- Ferrari, Franco, “La teoria delle idee in Plutarco”, *Elenchos*, 27, 1996, p. 121-142.
- Ferrari, Franco, “I commentari specialistici alle sezioni matematiche del *Timeo*”, in Aldo Brancacci (ed.), *La filosofia in età imperiale*, Napoli, Bibliopolis, 2000, p. 171-224.
- Ferrari, Franco, “Struttura e funzione dell’esegesi testuale nel medioplatonismo: il caso del *Timeo*”, *Athenaeum*, 89, 2001, p. 525-574.
- Ferrari, Franco, “Verso la costituzione del sistema: il medioplatonismo”, *Paradigmi*, 21, 2003, p. 345-354.
- Ferrari, Franco, “Dottrina delle idee nel medioplatonismo”, in Francesco Fronterotta, Walter Leszl (eds.), *Eidos – Idea. Platone, Aristotele e la tradizione platonica*, Sankt Augustin, Academia Verlag, 2005, p. 233-246.
- Ferrari, Franco, Review of G.-E. Karamanolis [*Plato and Aristotle in Agreement? Platonists on Aristotle from Antiochus to Porphyry*, Oxford, Clarendon, 2006], *Elenchos*, 31, 2010, p. 359-369.

- Ferrari, Franco, "L'esegesi medioplatonica del *Timeo*: metodi, finalità, risultati", in Francesco Celia, Angela Ulacco (eds.), *Il Timeo: esegesi greche, arabe, latine*, Pisa, Edizioni Plus-Pisa University Press, 2012, p. 81-131.
- Ferrari, Franco, "Materie, Seele und Bewegung vor der Weltentstehung: Plutarch und Attikos als Interpreten des Platonischen *Timaios*", in Jens Halfwassen, Tobias Dangel, Carl O'Brien (eds.), *Seele und Materie im Neuplatonismus – Soul and Matter in Neoplatonism*, Heidelberg, Universitätsverlag, 2016, p. 26-54.
- Ferrari, Franco-Baldi, Laura (eds.), *La generazione dell'anima nel Timeo*, Napoli, D'Auria, 2002-2006.
- Festugière, André-Jean, *Proclus. Commentaire sur le Timée*, Paris, Vrin, 1967.
- Frede, Michael, "Epilogue", in Keimpe Algra, Jonathan Barnes, Jaap Mansfeld, Malcolm Schofield (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Hellenistic Philosophy*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 771-797.
- Gioè, Adriano, *Filosofi medioplatonici del II secolo d.C.*, Napoli, Bibliopolis, 2002.
- Hatzimichali, Myrto, "The Texts of Plato and Aristotle in the First Century BC", in Malcolm Schofield (ed.), *Aristotle, Plato and Pythagoreanism in the First Century BC. New Directions for Philosophy*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2013, p. 1-27.
- Hatzimichali, Myrto, "Andronicus of Rhodes and the Construction of the Aristotelian Corpus", in A. Falcon (ed.), *Brill's Companion to the Reception of Aristotle in Antiquity*, Leiden-Boston, Brill, 2016, p. 81-100.
- Karamanolis, George E., *Plato and Aristotle in Agreement? Platonists on Aristotle from Antiochus to Porphyry*, Oxford, Clarendon, 2006.
- Merlan, Philip, *From Platonism to Neoplatonism*, The Hague, Martinus Nijhoff, 1953, 1960<sup>2</sup>.
- Michalewski, Alexandra, *La puissance de l'intelligible. La théorie plotinienne des Formes au miroir de l'héritage médioplatonicien*, Leuven, Leuven University Press, 2014.
- Michalewski, Alexandra, *The Reception of Aristotle in Middle Platonism (from Eudorus to Ammonius Saccas)*, in A. Falcon (ed.), *Brill's Companion to the Reception of Aristotle in Antiquity*, Leiden-Boston, Brill, 2016, p. 218-237.
- Michalewski, Alexandra, "Faut-il préférer Epicure à Aristote ? Quelques réflexions sur la providence", in Fabienne Baghdassarian, Gweltaz Guyomarc'h (éds.), *Réceptions de la théologie aristotélicienne d'Aristote à Michel d'Ephèse*, Leuven, Leuven-la-Neuve, Peeters, 2017, p. 108-123.
- Morau, Paul, *Der Aristotelismus bei den Griechen von Andronikos bis Alexander von Aphrodisias, I, Die Renaissance des Aristotelismus im 1. Jh. v. Chr.*, Berlin-New York, De Gruyter, 1973.
- Moreschini, Claudio, "Attico: una figura singolare nel medioplatonismo", *ANRW*, 36 (1), 1987, p. 477-491.
- Opsomer, Jan, "Demiurges in Early Imperial Platonism", in Reiner Hirsch-Luipold (ed.), *Gott und die Götter bei Plutarch*, Berlin, De Gruyter, 2005, p. 51-99.
- Petrucchi, Federico M., "ἀντέχεσθαι τῶν ῥεμάτων: The Neoplatonic Criticism of Atticus' Exegesis of Plato's Cosmology", in Jens Halfwassen, Tobias Dangel, Carl O'Brien (eds.), *Seele und Materie im Neuplatonismus – Soul and Matter in Neoplatonism*, Heidelberg, Universitätsverlag, 2016, p. 75-103.

Chiara Bonuglia

- Petrucci, Federico M., “Argumentative Strategies for Interpreting Plato’s Cosmogony: Taurus and the Issue of Literalism in Antiquity”, *Phronesis*, 61, 2016, p. 43-59.
- Petrucci, Federico M., *Taurus of Beirut. The Other Side of Middle Platonism*, London-New York, Routledge, 2018.
- Praechter, Karl, “Die Philosophie des Altertums”, in Friedrich Ueberweg, *Grundriss der Geschichte der Philosophie*, Berlin, Mittler & Son, 1920.
- Sedley, David, “Plato’s Auctoritas and the Rebirth of the Commentary Tradition”, in Jonathan Barnes, Miriam Griffin (eds.), *Philosophia Togata II. Plato and Aristotle at Rome*, Oxford, Clarendon, 1997, p. 110-129.
- Sharples, Robert. W., *Peripatetic Philosophy 200 BC to AD 200. An Introduction and Collection of Sources in Translation*, Cambridge-New York, Cambridge University Press, 2010.
- Thévenaz, Pierre, *L’âme du monde, le devenir et la matière chez Plutarque*, Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 1938.
- Whittaker, John, *Platonic Philosophy in the Early Centuries of Empire*, *ANRW*, II, 36 (1), 1987, p. 81-123.
- Zambon, Marco, *Porphyre et le moyen-platonisme*, Paris, Vrin, 2002.

CHIARA BONUGLIA  
ILIESI-CNR / Università degli Studi di Salerno  
[chiarabonuglia@gmail.com](mailto:chiarabonuglia@gmail.com)